

Communicating With and About People with Disabilities



About 50 million Americans report having a disability. Most Americans will experience a disability some time during the course of their lives. Disabilities can affect people in different ways, even when one person has the same type of disability as another person. Some disabilities may be hidden or not easy to see.

People First Language

People first language is used to speak appropriately and respectfully about an individual with a disability. People first language emphasizes the person first not the disability. For example, when referring to a person with a disability, refer to the person first by using phrases such as: “a person who ...”, “a person with ...” or, “person who has...”

Here are suggestions on how to communicate with and about people with disabilities.



For more information about disability and health, visit www.cdc.gov/disabilities

People First Language	Language to Avoid
Person with a disability	The disabled, handicapped
Person without a disability	Normal person, healthy person
Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability	Retarded, slow, simple, moronic, defective or retarded, afflicted, special person
Person with an emotional or behavioral disability, person with a mental health or a psychiatric disability	Insane, crazy, psycho, maniac, nuts
Person who is hard of hearing	Hearing impaired, suffers a hearing loss
Person who is deaf	Deaf and dumb, mute
Person who is blind/visually impaired	The blind
Person who has a communication disorder, is unable to speak, or uses a device to speak	Mute, dumb
Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound
Person with a physical disability, physically disabled	Crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, spastic
Person with autism	Autistic
Person with epilepsy or seizure disorder	Epileptic
Person with multiple sclerosis	Afflicted by MS
Person with cerebral palsy	CP victim
Accessible parking or bathrooms	Handicapped parking or bathroom
Person of short stature	Midget
Person with a congenital disability	Birth defect
Person with Down syndrome	Mongoloid
Person who is successful, productive	Has overcome his/her disability, is courageous